

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 10339

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR, MILI, IS, LE
SUBJECT: MOVEMENT OF LEBANESE BATTALION INTO CENTRAL SOUTH LEBANON

REF: (A) BEIRUT 4678; (B) TEL AVIV 10332; (C) TEL AVIV 10254
(D) JERUSALEM 2244

1. IN MY NUMEROUS MEETINGS WITH WEIZMAN CONCERNING THE
SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, INCLUDING MY MOST RECENT
(REF B), AND IN WILLIAMS' MEETING WITH EITAN (REF C),
WE HAVE RECEIVED REPEATED ASSURANCES FROM THE GOI THAT
IT WILL DO EVERYTHING IT CAN TO CONTROL AND INFLUENCE
THE MILITIAS IN THE ENCLAVES AND THE ENCLAVE COMMANDERS
IN ORDER TO AVOID FURTHER CONFRONTATION WITH AND FIRE
DIRECTED AGAINST THE LEBANESE BATTALION. BEGIN MADE
SIMILAR STATEMENT IN FORMAL MEETING WITH SECRETARY ON
AUGUST 6. HOWEVER, THEY HAVE ALSO REPEATEDLY SAID THAT
THEIR EXTENT OF CONTROL IS LIMITED AND THERE IS A POINT
BEYOND WHICH THE MILITIA COMMANDERS CANNOT BE RELIED

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ON TO OBEY GOI ORDERS, MUCH LESS ALL OF THOSE ELEMENTS MORE OR
LESS UNDER THEIR COMMAND. BEN GAL AND EITAN ARE PARTICULARLY
CONCERNED ABOUT THE WESTERN-MOST ENCLAVE AND ITS COMMANDERS
SHIDDIAC AND ZAATER. AS WE REPORTED IN REF C, EITAN
INSISTS THAT SHIDDIAC AND, IN HIS ABSENCE, ZAATER ARE
ALSO RECEIVING ORDERS FROM THE PHALANGISTS IN BEIRUT,
AND EITAN SAYS HE BELIEVES THAT THE ORDERS MAY VERY WELL BE

DIRECTED TOWARD OBSTRUCTING THE MOVEMENT OF THE LEBANESE BATTALION INTO TIBNIN.

2. IN RESPONSE TO THE SECOND QUESTIONS POSED BY REF A, I AGREE WITH DICK PARKER THAT IF THE LEBANESE USE THEIR OWN HELICOPTERS TO MOVE TROOPS, THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE ANY NUMBER THEY WANT AND NOT JUST A COMPANY. I BASE THIS CONCLUSION ON THE FACT THAT EITAN TOLD BOTH WILLIAMS AND ME THT THERE IS NO REPEAT NO OBJECTION TO THE MOVEMENT OF THE ENTIRE BATTALION, OTGETHER WITH ITS HEAVY EQUIPMENT, INTO SOUTH LEBANON VIA THE NABATIYYA ROUTE. THE GOI HAS ALSO POSED NO OBJECTION TO THE USE OF LEBANESE HELICOPTERS. ANY MOVE BY HELICOPTER WOULD, OR COURSE, BE WITHOUT THE HEAVY EQUIPMENT, WHICH IS ANOTHER ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF THE LAND ROUTE.

3. COMMENT: DO NOT SEE ANY POINT IN GOING BACK AGAIN TO GOI JUST NOW FOR FURTHER ASSURANCES CONCERNING RESTRAINT OF THE MILITIAS. THEY HAVE GIVEN THEM AS CATEGORICALLY AS THEY WILL, ALL THE WHILE MAKING CLEAR THAT THEY CANNOT PROMISE COMPLETE MILITIA DISCIPLINE AND WARNING US ABOUT HOTHEADS. AS I SAID IN REF B, I AGAIN TOLD THEM LAST NIGHT THAT THEY MUST CONTINUE TO IMPRESS UPON THE ENCLAVE LEADERS THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT NO FURTHER SHELLING TAKE PLACE. IT MIGHT ALSO BE HELPFUL FOR BEIRUT TO GET WORD TO THE PHALANGISTS AND
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URGE THEM TO HELP KEEP SHIDDIAC AND ZAATER UNDER CONTROL.

4. WOULD CAUTION ALL READERS NOT TO FORGET THAT CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN SOUTH ARE LEBANESE, NOT STRIKINGLY DIFFERENT FROM LEBANESE MILITIAS IN BEIRUT AREA WHERE "INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE" HAS RESULTED IN ALL CEASEFIRES BREAKING DOWN WITH DISCOURAGING REGULARITY. HAVE DETECTED TENDENCY TO ACCEPT AS GOSPEL AMATEURISH ANALYSIS OF ISRAELI BEHAVIOR BY OBSERVERS LIKE AIME, WHOSE UNDERSTANDING OF HOW IDF AND GOI WORK IS UNINFORMED, TO PUT IT CHARITABLY. ISRAEL IS NOT A BANANA REPUBLIC; THE IDF IS A HIGHLY DISCIPLINED FORCE, THOROUGHLY SUBJECT TO CIVILIAN DIRECTION. THE PROBLEM OF OBTAINING IRON-CLAD ASSURANCES THAT THE MILITIAS WILL NOT HARASS THE LAF IS NOT THAT WEIZMAN'S ORDERS ARE BEING CIRCUMBENTED. SIMPLY PUT, IT IS THAT SHIDDIAC IS A PETTY LEBANESE WARLORD ONLY PARTLY UNDER ISRAELI CONTROL. IF THE LAF COMES TO TIBNIN IT HAS TO ACCEPT SOME RISK, AS ANY ARMY MUST. SURROUNDED BY UNIFIL ON ALL SIDES, THAT RISK SHOULD BE WITHIN TOLERABLE LIMITS.

5. ONE FINAL THOUGHT. MIKE NEWLIN TELLS ME ERSKINE INTENDS TO
BRING UP WITH KHOURY THE SUGGESTION THAT HE NOT MOVE THE
BATTALION AS FAR SOUTH AS TIBNIN BUT RATHER
POSITION IT FURTHER NORTH IN THE VICINITY OF THE IRANIAN
CONTINGENT. THIS WOULD STILL GET THE BATTALION SOUTH OF
THE LITANI IN THE CENTRAL AREA, YET WOULD INCREASE THE
RANGE FROM THE ENCLAVES AND SHOULD PROVE TO BE LESS
PROVOCATIVE TO THE MILITIAS. THIS SOUNDS TO US LIKE A
GOOD IDEA.
LEWIS

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